Transposition
Musique et Sciences Sociales

6 | 2016
Lignes d'écoute, écoute en ligne

"New Avenues for Listening." Sensory Culture in the Digital Age and the Persistence of Utopia

An Interview with Michael Bull

Violeta Nigro Giunta and Nicolò Palazzetti

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/transposition/1580
DOI: 10.4000/transposition.1580
ISSN: 2110-6134

Publisher
CRAL - Centre de recherche sur les arts et le langage

Electronic reference
Violeta Nigro Giunta and Nicolò Palazzetti, « "New Avenues for Listening." Sensory Culture in the Digital Age and the Persistence of Utopia », *Transposition* [Online], 6 | 2016, Online since 20 March 2017, connection on 30 July 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/transposition/1580 ; DOI : 10.4000/transposition.1580

"New Avenues for Listening." Sensory Culture in the Digital Age and the Persistence of Utopia

An Interview with Michael Bull

Violeta Nigro Giunta and Nicolò Palazzetti

1 Michael Bull is a Professor of Sound Studies in the Department of Media and Film at the University of Sussex, in England. His research centers on the relationship between new mobile technologies and auditory culture in everyday life, at the crossroads of urban studies, media studies and sound studies. Starting from the mobile experience of music, he focuses on how personal stereos (the Walkman and later the iPod) not only change the way we manage and store music, but also transform urban subjectivity and our relations to the public space. These devices allow us to create our own private soundscapes and soundworlds, to reconfigure and aestheticize our lives, while denying the contingency of everyday experience in a world that is, in reality, beyond our control.

2 Michael Bull is the author of *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life* (Oxford, Berg, 2000) and *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience* (London, Routledge, 2007). He is the founder and managing editor of the journal *The Senses and Society*; he also edited *Sound Studies: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* (London, Routledge, 2013) and co-edited, with Les Back, *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford, Berg, 2003).

3 In this interview, conducted during the conference *Music on the Move: Sounds and New Mobilities* (Ehess, Paris, December 8, 2015), Michael Bull talks about his background in sociology and philosophy, his research on personal stereos, his theoretical references (from Simmel to Adorno), and his views on the future developments of studies on sound culture, the senses, and society.

A Greek Beach and a Canadian River: The Background of a Sound Scholar and the Origins of a "New" Discipline

VIOLETA NIGRO GIUNTA AND NICOLÒ PALAZZETTI — You come from a background in media studies. Therefore, we could say that you are the "son" of Marshall McLuhan rather than Carl Dahlhaus. Can you tell us more about your background and how, coming from media, you arrived to sounds?

Michael Bull — In fact, I do not come from a media background, but from sociology and philosophy. I happened to end up in a media department by accident. And I arrived to sound also by accident.

I had this idea of studying what people did with Walkmans.[1] It occurred to me when I was walking along a Greek beach and there was no one there apart from one person, a man who had no clothes on: he was sitting and watching the sea with a pair of headphones and a Walkman. And I thought: "That is very strange! Why does he do that?" That was the beginning of the study of Walkmans, since I soon realized that no one had studied them properly before, at least not from a user perspective. There was a total absence of scholarship, so I thought I would start interviewing people.

Actually, I came to the study of personal stereo use from an urban perspective. I have read the most important urban theorists: Michel de Certeau, Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin. But what I soon discovered, when I started interviewing people, was that none of the urban theories worked because they are largely based on a visual epistemology of urban behavior, whereas I was dealing with sound in some way. I say "in some way" because whilst I do work on sound, I believe you should not abstract sound from the other senses. We can re-establish the importance of sound, but not in and for itself.

That is the beginning of the story. And, incidentally, I did the research on Walkmans while I was at Goldsmiths (University of London) in the Department of Sociology. The story of how I became a media scholar could probably be told another day.

V. N. G. AND N. P. — "Sound studies" have been defined as an "interdisciplinary ferment in the human sciences that takes sound as its analytical point of departure or arrival. By analyzing both sonic practices and the discourses and institutions that describe them, it re-describes what sound does in the human world, and what humans do in the sonic world."[2] Would you agree with this definition? How would you define the field of sound studies in relation to musicology?

M. B. — It is only with great difficulty that I would define "sound studies". And indeed, it would be through their interdisciplinarity, musicology being one discipline among others.

Traditionally, people tend to define sound studies through Murray Schafer's concept of "soundscape,"[3] i.e. how we understand the cultural positioning of sound, its production and reception within a given cultural and historical sphere. For me that is a start, but that is also where I part with Murray Schafer: at the end of the river in Canada. My problem with early acoustemology—no one spoke of "sound studies" yet—is that it was anti-urban, and romantic. Moreover, it was "a small club". It was fine, it served its purpose and I still think that Murray Schafer's edict to learn how to listen—his

pedagogy of listening—was good. Nevertheless, the rest of his theory I have gotten rid of, in terms of my own work. How can a theory of sound studies have schizophrenia symptoms in relation to the displacement of sounds out of their natural habitat? I cannot support this kind of theory.

I would dare say that we cannot understand sound within one discipline. Sound includes the arts, social sciences, and humanities. Sound includes history, and historians looking at archives did much of the early and good work on sound. They did not hear anything, but read the texts. For instance, Alain Corbin's fantastic book on village bells[4] is exemplary in terms of how you might study sounds when you do not hear them. Sound studies include also human geography, sociology, media studies—with all the research on the massification of media within everyday life—, architecture, archaeology, and literature.

Whatever the discipline, there will be a sonic end. The difficulty is whether one can or should unify those approaches. I am fairly agnostic about it because I have a resistance to something too unified. Nevertheless, we are slowly developing new theoretical frameworks that are suitable for certain ways of studying sound. For example, there are many researches coming out from a Deleuzian perspective, especially around sound art and aesthetics, both fields where sound studies seem to be thriving. Even if I have a resistance towards those topics as well as a slight problem with Deleuze, I think these new studies are brilliant.

Senses, Technology and Society in Urban Everyday Life: "Digital Sherpas" and Personal Stereos

V. N. G. AND N. P. — You have suggested that the use of the Walkman was a way of controlling our auditory experience in the urban space, of managing everyday life through sound. In the case of the iPod—due mainly to the characteristics of the mp3 format—, you have pointed out that the contingency of having to choose what music we take with us has disappeared.[5] In what other ways do the uses of these two devices, i.e. the Walkman and the iPod, differ?

M. B. — The Walkman is very simple, for it uses cassette tapes. These were followed by mini-discs, mini-tapes, CDs, etc. They were not very pliable and you would have to carry a lot of things with you. The cassettes are my favorite, because they enabled people to choose the sequence of music and to construct these nice tapes. Also, users would decide which tapes they would take with them for the day, which meant that they would have to think about what mood they might be in, or what journey they might take. It implied real planning. So even if in the case of the Walkman there were fewer possibilities to manage the music, people adjusted to the technology and its use became normal.

In fact, even now there are people managing their experience through a 45-minute tape. Sometimes, they would use obsessively the same tape for the same journey, or have happy or miserable tapes, to either confirm their mood or change it. For instance, if you are melancholic, you take your tape of Leonard Cohen's songs and confirm your melancholy. In the Walkman era, tapes enabled everybody to manage their mood and to deny the contingency of the world around them. In fact, all the people I interviewed said there was a moment of astonishment or shock when they arrived to the end of the tape: you were taken out of the world until you put another tape on. Therefore, there

were some limitations in the Walkman, but people did not know anything else and, for them, it was fantastic. Nevertheless, I would have to say that at the time of Walkmans, there was still something unusual about going around the street with a pair of headphones on. I remember one woman said to me in an interview: "when I am listening to it on the tube, it's a little bit like opening your handbag out in public and seeing it's all messy inside". You were taking your private behavior out in public.

With the rise of mp3, it is amazing how quickly people dropped the Walkman. Now, you had your whole music collection with you, which produced a different set of issues about management and control. For instance, the notion of choice is very different. People started constructing playlists because they were malleable and you could change them on the go, and you also had the "random" function. The iPod was the beginning of the digital archive: you carry your own digital archive around with you, everywhere. As a result, the notion of immediacy, gratification, and expectation changed. The iPod user is what I called the "digital Sherpa,"[6] as when you are climbing the Himalayas, the Sherpa carry everything and do everything for you.

Finally, I think that with the rise of the iPod, there has been an increase in the use: most people listen to more music than before. At the same time, there is not much more sensibility regarding the quality of sound—I was really surprised that, out of everybody I spoke to, only one person mentioned quality of sound.

V. N. G. AND N. P. — You present the Walkman as the "first truly mobile consumer technology".[7] Considering that mobility in music already existed before the Walkman, what motivates this statement?

M. B. — "The Walkman is the first mobile technology" is not an accurate statement. Obviously, there were other mobile technologies before the Walkman: early radio and crystal radio, music and cassette tapes in cars, and the transistor radio. Transistor radio dates back to the 1950s and, normally, has one earpiece. When I was a kid I used to go to football matches and the people used to have one earpiece, so they could listen to the scores of other football matches at the same time. All those things were pre-existing, and in some ways, there is nothing completely new about the Walkman other than the fact that it consists of a pair of headphones attached to a cassette.

Nevertheless, I think the Walkman is the first sort of technology where you can walk around on your own and have something that is totally closed to you. With the Walkman, you have got your own music on it; on a transistor radio, it is not completely private and, most of all, you do not have total control over it. Maybe a closer relationship exists between the Walkman and music in cars, depending on how you define a car. You can define it as a "mobile bubble," since most car journeys are still carried out by solitary individuals. But other car journeys are shared and produce a different dynamic.

In a nutshell, I think that the Walkman, more than anything else, paved the way to the acceptability of mobile phones—there was much less resistance to walking around with a mobile phone than before Walkmans. My joke about mobile phone is this: people that are mad have benefitted greatly from it because, prior to mobile phones, if someone was walking down the street talking to themselves, others would stare. Nowadays, we just think they are on the phone. More seriously, I believe that the Walkman paved the way for that acceptance of private behavior in public. It has truly shifted that relationship between public and private.

V. N. G. AND N. P. — At first glance, your research seems to focus on new technological sound objects, but we think that it is actually more about practices, about the relationships between the senses, technology, and society in the urban space. In *Sounding out the city*, you wrote: "It is not my concern to discuss types of music but rather to discuss the role of personal stereos, as a piece of communication technology, in the construction of mundane everyday experience."[8] Why is the music that users listen to unimportant?

M. B. — Adorno said he was never fully secure in analyzing music. So, I thought: "if Adorno does not feel secure, why would I feel secure?" That is the simpler answer. The more accurate answer is that I believe it did not matter what piece of music it was. I was looking at structures of use, and doing a critical phenomenology of use. I have never felt happy to discuss the specificity of the music because it over-determines its content in relationship to the subjective reception of it. As a result, I do not like theories that talk about music as a language. I give the example in my book of this woman who cries every time she hears the Beatles' song *In My Life*.[9] She says: "I don't like this song, but it was my father's favorite song and he died. So, when I hear it I think about him." Maybe this constitutes an unusual example, but I believe the meaning of music is often attached to a whole variety of subjective responses, which mix with the structures of use. In this sense, my study on structures of use was an attempt to get away from the specificity of musical pieces. More precisely, in *Sounding out the City*, via Max Weber's notion of ideal type, I tried to construct a typology that could include both aspects.

So, on the one hand, you can talk about subjective response; but, on the other hand, you can get away from the individualization of the subjective response by constructing a structure of use. In any case, I did not want to obtain all those stereotypes you have got in media studies: *passive* consumers, *active* consumers, etc. Indeed, the structure of experience changes over the time. I have always been interested in how we use technologies to construct our sense of the social, in how the notion of the social changes through the technologies. Therefore, we come back to Marshall McLuhan. He was totally unfashionable until digitalization came on and, suddenly, he became fashionable again, although he flirted with the notion of technological determinism. Actually, I never met a technological determinist and I would not know what one looks like.

V. N. G. AND N. P. — In a 2010 review of your book *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*, the sociologist Lisa McCormick writes that "since the publication of *Sound Moves*, iPods and mobile phones have merged into one device, while video recording and Geographic Positioning Systems have become standard features".[10] The "bubble" created by the iPhone is no longer the mere "sonic bubble" of the iPod. Does the smartphone attest the beginning of a new sensorial experience?

M. B. — The advent of the smartphone has not made all the research on the iPod redundant. However, it has created a different configuration of the sensorium. Very early on, I found out that you must not tie your research to any one specific technology because that would mean you are chasing after technologies. For example, I think that many of the insights of *Sounding Out the City* about Walkman use are still relevant for iPod or mp3 use. Having said that, smartphones are something else. There is a whole series of issues coming out from the smartphone, because suddenly, sound is in competition with the visual much more closely than before. Just look at all the apps: listening to music is in competition with a thousand of other things that you can do at the same time. In that sense, the smartphone relativized sound and privatized the city,

but not in terms of solitary individuals. Through the smartphone, it is *groups* of individuals that privatize and segmentalize the city, according to their own social-economic tastes. And, as a consequence, the smartphone tends to confirm people in their own cultural prejudices. From a sociological perspective, it is not a free technology.

When I did my research on how people use the smartphones, I observed that users are tracking their own movements, finding out where to go; they are connecting with their friends in a lot of different places, they are monitoring, they are surveying. I think that smartphone use is highly Foucauldian, more than iPod use. And, in fact, it would be really reductive to just look at sound on smartphones.

Going back to my work, I have always been interested in mundane everyday practices and in generalities; I am not so interested in marginal uses or even aesthetic uses. I am interested in broad patterns: how most people use mobile technologies and how the structure of use is broken down into different social classes, genders, etc. The social experience in the urban sphere is segmented in many different ways and we risk getting locked into our own patterns of understanding and explanation. For example, with regard to the smartphone, you cannot just interview your own students and then make broad claims about Smartphone use based on thirteen sport students in Melbourne.

"I Am an Unrepentant Frankfort School Enthusiast" : The Sound and the Senses in Twentieth-Century Western Thought

V. N. G. AND N. P. — In *The Auditory Culture Reader*, you refer to the mythical episode of Homer's *Odyssey* in which Ulysses encounters the sirens as both an example of the first "mediatized sonic experience" and "the first description of the privatization of experience through sound".[11] What could this episode show concerning the relation between media and sound?

M. B. — I appreciate what Adorno and Horkheimer say about that episode.[12] At the same time, I criticized them because in their interpretation the sonic element seemed to be subsumed under issues of social classes and cultural origins. Whereas what struck me in this passage of Homer's *Odyssey* is that there are *only* Odysseus and the sirens. And if we follow Kafka, the sirens were not even singing at all: Odysseus imagined that they were singing.[13] What the episode of the sirens exhibits is a reconfiguration of sonic space. This is the first experience, to my knowledge, of a privatization of space through a sound technology: the first personal stereo. The technology was the wax put in the ears of his comrades and, at the same time, the fact that Odysseus was free of the wax.

In my opinion, the episode of the sirens should be understood in terms of sound technologies in space, with a set of cultural values attached to them. In this sense, I am interested in describing the values attached to vision and sound in these early writings. For instance, it seems to me that in the ancient world sound was probably perceived as more democratic. In my next work, which is on sirens—Odysseus' sirens but also warning sirens—I want to develop this research on cultural values attached to sound and senses.

V. N. G. AND N. P. — You mentioned Adorno. We notice that you do not endorse the implied totalitarian nature of technology contained in Adorno's thought, his pessimism. Nevertheless, you wrote that Adorno's thinking highlights "the auratic quality of music together with its integrative and utopian function […]. The subjective desire to transcend the everyday through music becomes a focal point of his analysis, as is the desire to remain 'connected' to specific cultural products".[14] What is this sense of transcendence, this utopia, this sense of connection, contained in Adorno's thought? Can we sum it up in the concept of "we-ness"?

M. B. — I have always been a generous analyst of Adorno because of the negative or superficial reception of his thought in the English-speaking world. And I like his sense of the utopian moment in a repressive reality. For example, there is that passage from the *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*[15] where Adorno describes someone walking down the street who suddenly hears music coming from a pub, and is reminded of sociality and warmth. He then goes into the pub, but there is no one inside: it is just the jukebox playing. In this sense, Adorno states that music substitutes for what we really want, our desires. This is the "we-ness;" it is a false, yet real, promise. That level of ambiguity in Adorno's thought is very valuable, because it allows us to escape simple dichotomies.

The we-ness is the utopian moment, even though it is also tainted. Could I describe Adorno as an optimistic pessimist, whereas Herbert Marcuse would be the other way around, i.e. a pessimistic optimist? I have always appreciated Adorno's critiques of standard cultural understandings of what it is that we do. More precisely, I admire the fact that Adorno would consider people going to classical concerts in exactly the same way as people going to Beatles concerts. He was searching for those similarities. Certainly, I do not agree with his mere reduction of music as a form of utopia and social critique. But I do agree with his sense of critique, with the fact that he looks at similarities within common practices, within music reception and technology. I think that his thought is more and more relevant for our era, in which there are increased forms of commodification.

For me Adorno represents a starting point. If I am honest, I have to say that I am an unrepentant Frankfort School enthusiast. It was the most interdisciplinary school of its period. As you know, in 2014, it was the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man.*[16] Obviously, not all of Marcuse's thought is useful because a part of his analysis was an analysis of imminence. But in certain tendencies and concepts, such as Marcuse's notion of objective alienation—where interiority is invaded—or the relationship between repression and commodification, I still think that Marcuse could be really useful. And he is not that far from Foucault. All those theories have some running in them, if you can preserve some distance.

V. N. G. AND N. P. — Georg Simmel was understood as the champion of the visual paradigm in urban studies, i.e. the primacy of sight over the other senses in urban practices and movements. Nevertheless, some of his insights have a great influence on a sound scholar like yourself: the conception of the social space as a moral space, the notion of retreating subjectivity, etc. For example, you wrote that Simmel's "awareness of and discussion of the nature of the auditive in relation to the visual tends to be overlooked by most commentators".[17] Do we have to deconstruct our image of Simmel?

M. B. — Simmel was a fantastic writer for his time. How relevant is Simmel today, and can we use him? Of course, we can use Simmel! And we can use also Walter Benjamin—for instance, I use his concept of *flâneur*, but with an understanding of how things have

changed. In the 1980s, all those theorists were used as if the world had not changed: that was the problem. But they all have exceptional insights and you do not just junk traditional theories.

If we just look at Simmel's *The Metropolis*,[18] which is an essay of only about twelve pages, we can realize how highly original he was as a sociologist and urbanist. In Simmel's thought, I like his analysis of how we manage space. It is a good starting point indeed: how do you manage space? How do you deal with other people? I dislike his postulate that "we all live in city centers," which is very odd, because most people do not live in city centers. As a consequence of that, there is less research on suburbanization and on outskirts, where people never see anyone else. Maybe not in Bombay, but in the Western model, the city centers are statistically much less common in terms of people's everyday experience.

If you would take the example of someone walking down a suburban deserted street with a Walkman on, it does not fit Simmel's model of experience at all. So you have to be cautious with traditional theories, and that is why I prefer empirical work. It is only by doing empirical work that you find out that the theories you are using do not fit the reality. And that allows you to develop new theories. I do conceive theory as a response to questions you cannot answer when you are looking at how the world changes. If you stick to the theory without looking or listening, then you repeat a lot of mistakes. My crucial concern is: how do you use empirical work in order to develop theory?

V. N. G. AND N. P. — Some of the most important contributions in the study of sounds and auditory culture come from France: Jacques Attali, Pierre Schaeffer, Michel Chion, and, more recently, Peter Szendy.[19] Do you think there is a French tradition in sound studies? Has it influenced your own work?

M. B. — I have a quip: my French influence stops with the death of Sartre! When I was a kid, I was totally immersed in Sartre, Camus, and Merleau-Ponty. At the same time, I never got on with Althusser, and I was never a Foucauldian—since everyone was a Foucauldian, so I did not want to be a Foucauldian. Afterwards I became more Foucauldian, once people did not use it so much anymore. We have a joke in England, that the English start reading French writers after they have become unfashionable in France.

I like Attali's *Bruits*, even if I prefer the statements rather than the analysis. On the contrary, Pierre Schaeffer seems too close to traditional soundscape analysis. There is nothing wrong with his writings, but if you remember my interest in commonality and structures, you can see that Schaffer's work on *musique concrète* is placed somewhere else.

My work develops out of a more social-scientific background and this is the reason why I prefer all the research that comes out of CRESSON.[20] Having said that, I am not too much concerned in the measurement of noise in streets over many months. For to me, this is still too attached to the traditional soundscape, even if they are doing it in an urban setting.

Strangely enough, I am probably more influenced by the International Situationism, and Gaston Bachelard. I love reading him. His work is not necessarily about sound, but it is on the sensorial.

In general, I prefer to look at all the senses, and not just sound. For instance, I have been rereading some Camus recently, and it struck me how his writing is immersed into the senses.

"New Avenues for Listening": Sensory Culture in the Digital Age and the Persistence of Utopia

V. N. G. AND N. P. — This issue of *Transposition*, co-edited by Stéphan-Eloïse Gras and Peter Szendy, focuses on online listening, on the effects of the "digital age," on listening and listening bodies. "Digital age" here is understood as the computerization of musical objects as well as the massive socialization of digital technologies on platforms that can create playlists for their users, establishing links among musical genres. One of the main questions for us if whether we can talk of new "listening lines," implying new regimes of listening and new audiences. What is your view on these new ways of listening?

M. B. — I think there are new *avenues* for listening. And the question that arises is whether those avenues produce new ways of listening. On a simple level, I would have to say yes, because every new channel will produce a new way of doing things. Is digital listening qualitatively different? This is the question. I believe that there are not as many differences as you might think there are.

On the one hand, in contemporary music production you can observe the de-specialization of composition and the democratization of music making. This throws open nice challenges, like moving away from authorship. People start saying, "it is not *my* work," or "it is *our* work," or "I do not *own* it". In terms of listening to music, there is more choice too.

On the other hand, we must cope with that dominant notion of commodifying people's choices based on existing choices. If you believe in the capitalist pull, then you observe a hyper-commodification. It is the idea of a consumer market, where one finds everything there is to listen to, everything there is to see. For example, I can remember in the days when there were record shops, and one would go to H&B, the biggest one in London. Actually, it was hard to discover new music. The first time I went into the jazz section, not knowing much about jazz, I could not work out what it was I should buy, because there were too many records. Certainly, you can discover new pieces just by a process of exploration. But what do you do when you find there are ten thousands of pieces of music that you would like to listen to, *now*? You can only listen to one at a time.

In the digital age, I think you have to increasingly consider this cornucopia of consumption, and how you place yourself within this ideology of the cornucopia. All there is to buy, all there is to consume. And this is dangerous, because it questions specificity. My view might come forward as old fashioned, but I think that we have 24 hours a day, and capitalism wants to take all those 24 hours and sell them back to us, as commodities.

In the history of the development of new technologies, there has always been a battle between enlightenment and commodification, which create new ways of doing things. This is apparent in many contemporary technologies, with the overpowering nature of global organizations that appropriate and use them. In a metaphorical sense, this is the

twenty-first century battle of who owns the printing press. Is it the subversives, is it the state, or is it capitalist organizations?

I conclude that those are the same issues that are playing out in our digital global framework. The history of the digital age could produce Adornian pessimism, but you also have to look at the moments of creativity. For instance, when iPods first came out, they provided great freedom: you could make pop songs that were two hours long. Some people did, but most are still three minutes long. So they are still stuck in the rationale of the 78-rpm.

As a consequence, the point about future, present and past, is that the past still manifests itself in cognitive notions about what something should be or how it should be. If you are looking at new ways, the new ways will incorporate the old ways as well.

V. N. G. AND N. P. — We have noticed that your research on sound conceals a more global interest in the sensory and the sensual. For instance, you are the founder and managing editor of the journal *The Senses and Society*[21] and you have just co-edited a book entitled *Ritual, Performance and the Senses*.[22] Why do we have to rediscover our awareness of the sensorium? What is its role in society?

M. B. — It seems very strange to me that you would just study one sense. If we are looking at embodiedness, then senses appear as very hybrid, one plays off against another. We mentioned Chion before, and his work is all audio-visual.[23] That constitutes an interesting point in media studies. In mediated experience, certain senses are highlighted—sound, vision, or touch—and the other senses seem to be left out because of the very nature of things—they are still trying to get cinemas where you can smell things. And I think that the mediated experience has a powerful influence in defining what sensibility is, precisely because it is disembodied. There is a rich literature about this topic, such as Jonathan Crary's work on sensorial restrictions.[24] Back in 2003, I had just done the *Auditory Culture Reader*,[25] and I thought: "how would you develop an epistemology based on all of the senses?"

With the journal *The Senses and Society*, the aim was to try to develop theoretical thinking that crossed over all the senses. It has been ten years since its creation, and it has only been partially successful, because it is so difficult to develop a theory as interdisciplinary as sound is. And I have to say that we receive a fantastic variety of work on the senses for the journal, but often difficult to connect together. There has probably been more advance in sound than in the other senses. As it is, sound does not need any special pleading, it is fully there.

I mentioned Merleau-Ponty before because he constitutes a great starting point, with his notions of inter-sensoriality and embodiedness, in order to question what we mean by the sensory spectrum. His work has been really important in my own work. I do specialize in sound, but I try to see the connections. I am happy with sound, but I am still learning how to write about the other senses.

V. N. G. AND N. P. — One final question. In a recent book, Brian Kane tells a new history of acousmatic listening in opposition to Pierre Schaeffer's classic approach.[26] In a nutshell, acousmatic listening, i.e. the occultation of the cause and the source of a sonic event, does not provoke a mere and more intense concentration of the listener on an abstract sonic object, as Schaeffer said. On the contrary, Kane rightly affirms that the separation—or the "spacing"—of the source, cause, and effect of the sound, provokes a feeling of anxiety and is used to open up the universe of the phantasmagoric, of the transcendent, of the supermundane. In this sense, there is continuity between the recessed orchestra pit in

Wagner's Festspielhaus (able to produce the "mystic gulf"), the Pythagorean veil, and *musique concrète*. We could think that the iPod user is also looking for a "spacing" between his listening and his actual environment: the urban space does not produce the music he's hearing in his iPod. Hence, could listening on the iPod be considered as an example of acousmatic listening? Isn't the iPod "bubble" an opening to a supermundane and phantasmagoric dimension? Finally, don't you think that the effects of acousmatic listening could be a form of audiotopia?

M. B. — Brian Kane has written an article for me in the new *Sound Studies Journal*, which is a sort of example of anti-sound-studies.[27] I quite like his critical approach, since I do not believe in over-determining structures, objects or receptions. Concerning my Walkman listener, it is true to say that our understanding of the city was traditionally over-determined in terms of what place is due to us. On the contrary, I argue that for a Walkman user or an iPod user, any space could be a non-space. Not necessarily is, but it *could* be. As a result, you could change the meaning of the urban space. You could do it without headphones, you could daydream, but daydreaming is not as effective as having the headphones on. With the personal stereos, you can construct the environment as something other, as you can construct your experience as something other.

Therefore, you can escape from yourself if you want, but it is escaping through a product. It is important to notice that it is still a commodity that you are using to construct your dream, to perform your strategies of the phantasmagoric or the utopian. You could argue that maybe, if you construct your whole journey as a dream, then that whole journey becomes a sort of utopia. But, this utopia is chained to the technology, and to the cultural meanings that you have been socialized to accept through this technology.

So dreams themselves are often commodified. Is this not also true of popular music? You sell the kids the dream, and then they get disappointed when they see that the "musicians" have cars and big houses, and the music is not there. In England, for example, we have all these TV shows about music, where people just want to be successful and where music is pure commodity, the same as a pizza. It would be very interesting, if you were then to look at the way in which someone would operationalize those dreams in terms of everyday life. The success could be a utopia, but fully commodified.

Here again, I say it *could* be. Indeed, what is interesting about subjectivity is the remainder, what is not fully explainable, what is not fully commodified. This is that utopian space in which users live. As you see, I have not progressed very far from Adorno.

NOTES

1. BULL, Michael, *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life*, Oxford, Berg, 2000.

2. STERNE, Jonathan (ed.), *The Sound Studies Reader*, London, Routledge, 2012, p. 2.

3. MURRAY SCHAFER, Raymond, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Experience and the Tuning of the World*, Rochester (VT), Destiny Books, 1994 [First edition: *The Tuning of the World*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1977].

4. CORBIN, Alain, *Les Cloches de la terre. Paysage sonore et culture sensible dans les campagnes au XIX^e^ siècle*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1994 [*Village Bells. The Culture of the Senses in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside*, translated by Martin THOM, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998].

5. BULL, Michael, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*, London, Routledge, 2007.

6. BULL, Michael, *Sound Moves*, *op. cit.*, p. 132. See also BULL, Michael, "iPod Use, Mediation, and Privatization in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in GOPINATH, Sumanth and STANYEK, Jason (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music*, vol. 1, New York, Oxford University Press, 2014.

7. BULL, *Sounding Out the City*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

8. BULL, *Sounding Out the City, op. cit.*, p. 14.

9. *In My Life* is a song by the Beatles released on the 1965 album *Rubber Soul*, the Beatles' sixth studio album. See Michael BULL, *Sound Moves, op. cit.,* p. 141.

10. MCCORMICK, Lisa, "Michael Bull, Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 35, no. 1, 2010, p. 210.

11. BACK, Les and BULL, Michael (eds.), *The Auditory Culture Reader*, Oxford, Berg, 2003 [second edition: London, Bloomsbury, 2015], p. 7-8.

12. HORKHEIMER, Max, and ADORNO, Theodor W., *Dialektik der Aufklarung*, Amsterdam, Querido, 1947 [*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John CUMMING, New York, Herder & Herder, 1972].

13. Here Bull is referring to *Das Schweigen der Sirenen* ["The Silence of the Sirens"], a short story by Franz Kafka published posthumously in 1931.

14. BULL, *Sounding Out the City, op. cit.*, p. 123.

15. ADORNO, Theodor W., *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, translated by E. B. ASHTON, New York, Continuum, 1989, p. 45 [Original edition: *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie*, Frankfurt-am-Main, Suhrkamp, 1962].

16. MARCUSE, Herbert, *One-Dimensional Man. Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Boston, Beacon, 1964.

17. BULL, *Sounding Out the City, op. cit.*, p. 116.

18. SIMMEL, Georg, *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben* ["The Metropolis and Mental Life"], Dresden, Petermann, 1903.

19. ATTALI, Jacques, *Bruits. Essai sur l'économie politique de la musique*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1977 [*Noise. The Political Economy of Music*, translated by B. MASSUMI, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985]; SCHAEFFER, Pierre, *Traité des objets musicaux* ["Treatise on Musical Objects"], Paris, Seuil, 1966 [second edition: 1977]; CHION, Michel, *Guide des objets sonores. Pierre Schaeffer et la recherche musicale* ["Guide to Sound Objects. Pierre Schaeffer and Musical Research"], Paris, Institut National de l'Audiovisuel-Buchet / Chastel, 1983; SZENDY, Peter, *Écoute, une histoire de nos oreilles*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 2001 [*Listen: A History of Our Ears*, translated by C. MANDELL, New York, Fordham University Press, 2008].

20. The *Centre de recherche sur l'espace sonore et l'environnement urbain* ["Centre for Research on Sonic Space and Urban Environment"] (CRESSON) is a research laboratory reporting to France's Architecture and Heritage Directorate (DAPA) , and located at the Graduate School of Architecture in Grenoble (ENSAG). See: "http://www.cresson.archi.fr/" (accessed: January 12, 2016).

21. *The Senses and Society* is a journal founded in 2006 by Michael Bull and David Howes, together with Doug Kahn and Paul Gilroy. It is published three times a year.

22. BULL, Michael and MITCHELL, Jon P. (eds.), *Ritual, Performance and the Senses*, London-New York, Bloomsbury, 2015.

23. See, for instance, CHION, Michel, *L'Audio-vision. Son et image au cinéma*, Paris, Nathan, 1990 [*Audio-Vision. Sound on Screen*, translated by C. GORBMAN, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994].
24. CRARY, Jonathan, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the End of Sleep*, London and New York, Verso, 2013; *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2000.
25. BACK and BULL (eds.), *The Auditory Culture Reader, op. cit.*
26. KANE, Brian, *Sound Unseen. Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2014. See also: PALAZZETTI, Nicolò, "Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen. Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice*", *Dissonance* no. 133, March 2016, p. 45-46.
27. KANE, Brian, "Sound Studies without Auditory Culture: A Critique of the Ontological Turn," *Sound Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1, no. 1, 2015, p. 2-21.

ABSTRACTS

Michael Bull is a Professor of Sound Studies at the University of Sussex, in England. His research focuses on the relationship between new mobile technologies and auditory culture in everyday life, at the crossroads of urban studies, media studies and sound studies. In this interview, he talks about his background in sociology and philosophy, his research on personal stereos, his theoretical references (from Simmel to Adorno), and his views on the future developments of studies on sound culture, senses, and society.

INDEX

Keywords: Sound Studies, iPod, Media Studies, Cultural Studies, Urban Studies, Sociomusicology, Frankfurt School

AUTHORS

VIOLETA NIGRO GIUNTA

Violeta Nigro Giunta is a pianist and musicologist. She is a PhD candidate at the Ehess (Cral) in Paris under the supervision of Esteban Buch. Her dissertation focuses on the transformations in the field of New Music in Buenos Aires after 1983. She contributed to the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism* and is the author of "*Vexations*, les deux temps d'une œuvre" (*Marges*, no. 19, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2014).

NICOLÒ PALAZZETTI

Nicolò Palazzetti is a PhD candidate at the Ehess (Cral) in Paris. His dissertation, supervised by Esteban Buch, focuses on the political and musical legacy of Béla Bartók in twentieth-century Italian culture. His articles and reviews have been published in many academic journals: *Analitica*, *Dissonance*, *Il Saggiatore musicale*, *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, *Rivista di Analisi e Teoria musicale*, *Rivista Italiana di Musicologia*, *Transposition*. He is the author of "The Bartók

Myth. Fascism, Modernism, and Resistance in Italian Musical Culture” (*International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 47, no. 2, 2016).